

49ERS

REPORT



Bring On Those Cowboys!!

Niners Blow Out Bears To Set Up Another Showdown

Poster Shot
Steve Young

... Page 9

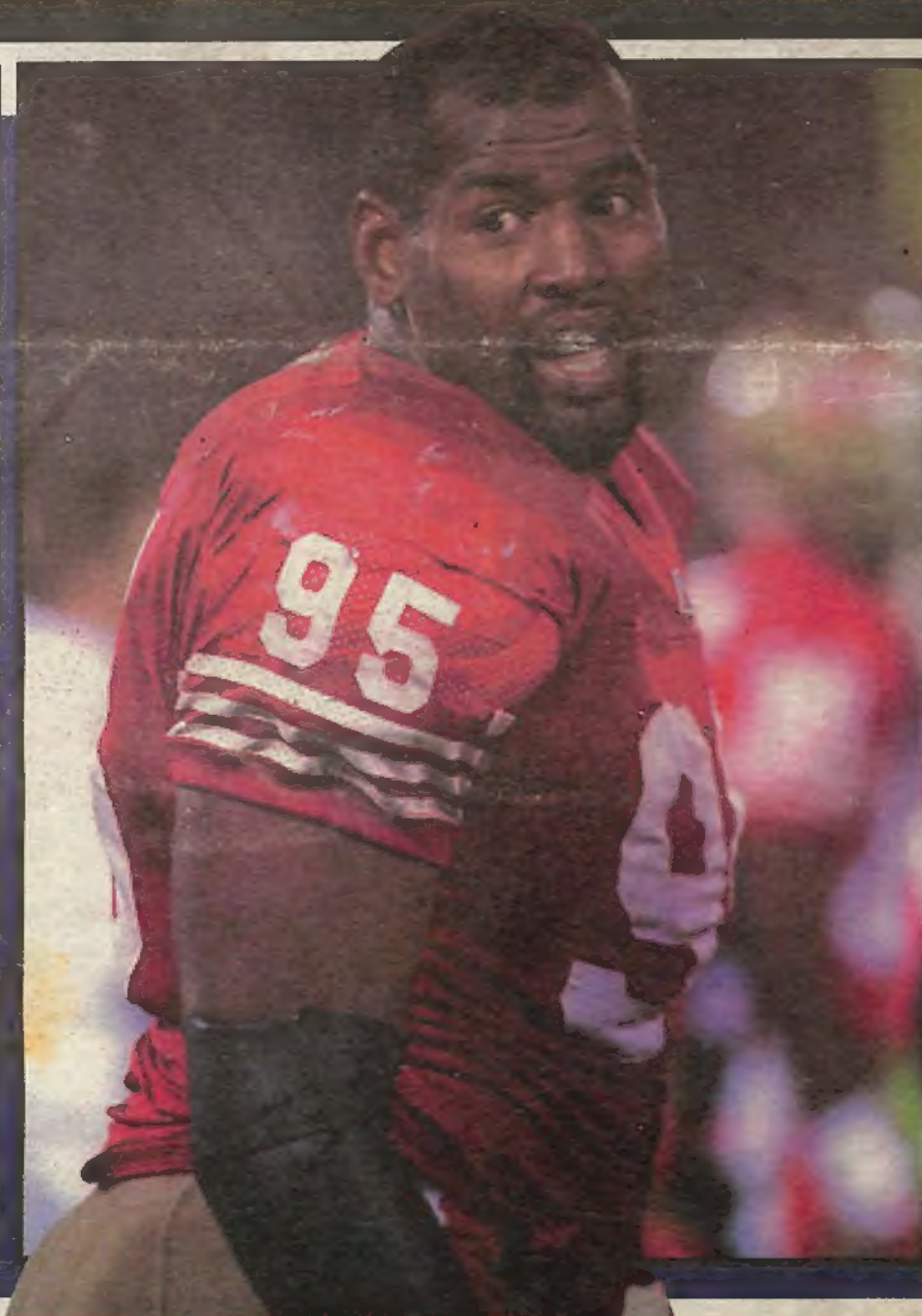
Young An MVP

QB Steve Young is the league's Most Valuable Player for the second time in his career.

NEXT ISSUE

Our next issue will be printed on Jan. 23, which will cover the NFC Championship Game and preview Super Bowl XXIX.

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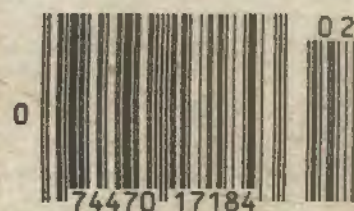


**Looking
back on a
remarkable
season**

... Page 12

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Richard Dent

Niners Missed His Pass Rush

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By Kevin Lynch

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FROM THE EDITOR

NOBODY MESSES WITH THE LEADER

KEVIN
LYNCH

What were the Bears expecting to do to Steve Young exactly? Was their strategy to hope he'd blew out an elbow spiking the ball? Did they hope he'd twist an ankle running down to congratulate a teammate after yet another touchdown?

In the afterglow of the 49ers' 44-15 victory, that seems like the only tactics the Bears were employing. And there were tactics to physically remove Young from the game, apparently.

"There was a report that came out, I think it was (former Cowboys coach) Jimmy Johnson of HBO," center Bart Oates said, "saying (the Bears) were trying to get Steve out of the game early."

USUALLY, WHAT JOHNSON says goes. He said the Cowboys would beat the 49ers in the NFC Championship game last year before the game and that it should be placed in big headlines. Of course, the Cowboys clubbed the 49ers.

When Johnson said the Bears were going after Young, the Niners took the threat seriously.

"It obviously heightens your concern, and your preparation," Oates said.

The offensive line protected Young like a fivesome of injured grizzlies. Young had so much time to throw he wasn't used to it. On one play Young sent both wide receivers, Jerry Rice and John Taylor, deep. Rice was

Young's primary target, and Young waited for Rice to complete his route. When half of the Bears' defense followed Young's eyes and smothered Rice, Young then turned to Taylor who was high-tailing it down the other sideline.

DEEP PATTERNS TAKE time to develop. So by the time Young looks to his secondary receiver on such patterns, he usually has a few 300-pound defensive ends trying to do chinups on his arms. But this time, there was no defender even close. Young isn't used to having so much time. The long period of inactivity was beginning to make him feel guilty. Young finally hoisted a spiral to Taylor, who was shrouded by double coverage. The ball was nearly intercepted. With such brilliant offensive line play, the notion of the Bears exacting a hurt on Young seemed silly.

The only way they were going to get him was to maybe kidnap him at halftime. One of the Bears could have grabbed Young as he strolled to the locker room, put him in a headlock and tried to give him a few noogies. A group of Bears might have been able to pin Young down in the hallway to give him a pink belly.

BUT AS FAR as injuring Young on the field of play it wasn't going to happen. Even when the Bears tried to cheap shot him, half the team came immediately to his rescue, and the one leading the charge was wide receiver Jerry Rice.

It happened late in the second quarter. Young sent four receivers into the end zone. When the Bears went scurrying to cover them, the field opened up like the Red Sea right in front of Young, who decided to just race the final 6 yards

to the end zone. Young darted from the pocket and crossed the goal line untouched.

About 5 yards deep into the end zone, safety Shaun Gayle jarred the unsuspecting Young with a body slam that would have made a punk rocker proud. The move sent Young reeling to the turf.

Within seconds, Gayle was smothered in Rice. After witnessing the late hit, Rice plowed into Gayle from one side and Brent Jones hit him from the other side.

The Shaun Gayle sandwich lead to a full-scale melee. Even if the Bears had the capacity to separate Young from his limbs or senses, the 49ers weren't going to allow it.

"It's scary," Rice said about the notion of trying to knock Young out of the game.

NOT SCARY ENOUGH that Rice couldn't come to the aid to a quarterback in distress.

"I surprised a lot of the guys today," Rice said. "They came up to me like I had won a bout or something."

What he did was protect a quarterback he wasn't too wild about two years ago. Rice was quite a supporter of Joe Montana before he left for Kansas City, mainly because he was used to Joe.

Rice is used to Young now, and he recently said the 49ers' offense is functioning better than ever.

"I think it's significant when you have Jerry Rice, who's supposed to be a finesse player, taking blows for your quarterback," linebacker Gary Plummer said.

There's already a rumor the Boys from Big D are planning to give Young a swirlie. Young shouldn't worry. Rice and the rest of the offensive team will be close by.

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YOUNG WINS MVP

Quarterback Steve Young won his second Most Valuable Player award in three years last week with 74 out of 98 votes.

Young outpaced Lions running back Barry Sanders who came in second with 22 votes. Two 49ers, Jerry Rice and Deion Sanders, got one vote each.

Young set a record for quarterback rating, beating Joe Montana's mark 112.8-112.4. He also set team records by completing 70.3 percent of his passes and throwing for 35 touchdowns.

SANDERS MADE THE choice difficult by narrowly missing a 2,000-yard rushing year.

"He's very deserving," Niners linebacker Ken Norton Jr. said of Young. Norton played against Young in his years with the Cowboys, and with him this season on the Niners.

"He had a fantastic year this year," Norton said. "He did all the right things, hit all the right people. He understands the whole field. Now, he holds onto the ball a little more than he used to and if guys aren't open deep, he'll dump it

off to Ricky Watters. It makes him more of a threat."

"IT'S FANTASTIC," Young said. "It's a tremendous honor to be considered at the top of my game. I felt like in '92 (his previous MVP season) that was kind of my first full year playing and it stood on its own, but this year I thought I've been playing long enough that the standard has been set, and I think I have to live up to it."

Young has received a lot of hardware this season. He won his second Len Eshmont Award, given to the most courageous and inspirational 49ers player, a few weeks ago in a vote of his teammates. He was also voted the NFC's starting quarterback in the Pro Bowl this year. He is likely to win other awards like a Pro Football Writers Association's Most Valuable Player. Cornerback Deion Sanders said Young deserves them all.

"WE COULDN'T function without Steve," Sanders said. "He's everything to this team."

The Niners called on Young early in the season, when he was getting sacked more often than Safeway groceries. Playing behind an injury-riddled line, Young was beaten

up every week. The team was facing a crisis after being drilled 40-8 by the Eagles in Week 5.

They fell behind the Lions 14-0 the very next week, but Young brought them back to a 27-21 victory, and the Niners won their next nine in a row.

"We were looking deep into the chasm of despair and were staring it right in the face," Young said of the Eagles game.

"WE WERE AT the bottom. I think the whole team kind of looked at it and said, 'This is not us,' and from that moment on ran away from it as fast as we could."

This has been a strange year for Young. He verbally lashed out at his coach on the sideline on national television. Young bawled out quarterbacks coach Gary Kubiak after being yanked from the Eagles game, and then belittled his displeasure at George Seifert.

"I look back at it and kind of chuckle," Young said. "How many times can you get away with screaming at and challenging your coach five feet from him? It was an insanity plea, and I got off."

DENT, TAMM RETURN

Defensive end Richard Dent and guard Ralph Tamm returned. Both had missed nearly all of the season.

It was special for Dent, who returned against his old team, the Bears. Dent said playing the Bears meant nothing to him and they were just "an obstacle" on the way to the NFC Championship game. But he didn't act like it and yelled at coaches after being pulled from a pass drill last week in practice.

NOTES
AND
QUOTES

DT Dana Stubblefield is doubling his charity pledge of \$100 a tackle for the playoffs. He will now donate \$200 a tackle for as long as the 49ers are in the playoffs ... Head Coach George Seifert said the 49ers are the healthiest they've been since the season opener ... The 17-point spread last week in the playoffs between the 49ers and Bears was the largest in NFL history according to the Nevada Sports Books ... Rookie FB William Floyd was named to the All-Madden team by sportscaster John Madden, honoring toughness and hard work ... The Niners practiced one day last week at Stanford University because their field was deemed too muddy after a rain.

49ERS FANS

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COACH'S CORNER


GEORGE SEIFERT

VERSATILITY GOT YOUNG THE AWARD

Q. DO YOU THINK STEVE YOUNG'S VERSATILITY AND DURABILITY MADE HIM THIS YEAR'S MOST VALUABLE PLAYER?

A. Very definitely. He's an all-around player. He's an excellent runner. The real thing that happened this year is he's in sync with the offense a lot more. He had

thrown for a lot of yards, he ran, he moved the club and we won ballgames. But this year he's doing those things, plus he has grasped our offense.

Q. HOW DOES THIS OFFENSE COMPARE WITH THE WAY YOUR OFFENSE WAS OPERATING THE LAST TIME THE 49ERS WON A SUPER BOWL?

A. It's operating about as well. Whether we will reach that point (the Super Bowl), I don't know. It's operating just as efficiently.

Q. ARE THE 49ERS IMMUNE TO A LETDOWN?

A. I don't think we're immune to anything. I would think we've worked awfully hard to get to this point. I don't anticipate our club would let down. I think they're a good football team and we're going to have to play well to have an opportunity. I find it hard to believe we would go out and not play with emotion and aggression. But it's a football game and we've got to do the things necessary to

win the ballgame. So I think that when you put two teams like this together anything can happen. What's happened in the past is over. It's, what do you do right now? And so any records that we've set, any number of points we've scored and sacks we've made don't mean a thing right now. Now this team (opponent) is the only thing.

Q. ARE YOU ANY CLOSER TO DECIDING WHETHER DEION SANDERS WILL RETURN KICKS?

A. He's ready to return kicks. Whether we'd start him in that position, we don't expect to do that. Dexter Carter will be the return man, but Deion will be ready. We can take it from there.

Q. HAS SANDERS HAD A POSITIVE EFFECT ON THE 49ERS OFF THE FIELD?

A. Very positive, and I've personally enjoyed working with him. Sometimes you get (on the practice field), and everything's by the numbers and militaristic. It gets old. How many years have I been coaching? To have this guy come in and turn things up makes for a much healthier environment.

Q. SANDERS SAID HE WAS PUT OFF BY A MEETING YOU HAD BEFORE HE SIGNED. WHAT DO YOU REMEMBER ABOUT THAT MEETING?

“HE'S AN ALL-AROUND PLAYER. HE'S AN EXCELLENT RUNNER.”

—GEORGE SEIFERT

A. Any negative feelings we might have had were expressed. All the cards were laid on the table and it allowed him to come in here and be himself, and it allowed me to be myself. It was a long conversation that was very to the point and very direct. Things were said about how we were going to do things.

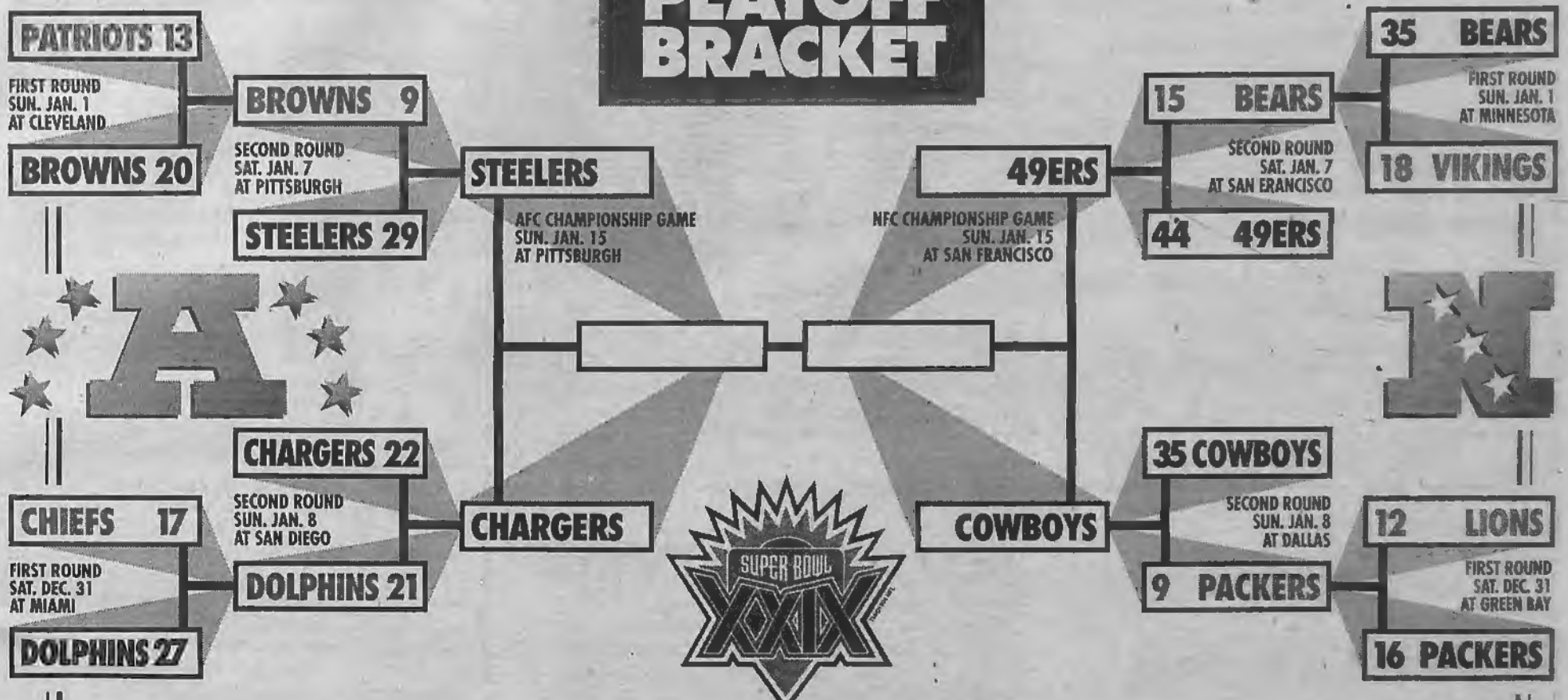
There were some things I said that probably offended him, I don't know, but it made for a much more harmonious situation since he's been here. Since he's been here I couldn't have asked for anything more in the way of a work ethic.

Q. ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT

ALL THE ATTENTION MIKE SHANAHAN IS GETTING FOR HEAD COACHING JOBS?

A. It's a tough thing right at this particular stage. First off, as far as my interactions with coaches, I don't see this year's any different as far as my concern about losing coaches. I'm concerned about it, but I'm more concerned about losing this game. I think the coaches are as well, even those who are having their names mentioned (for coaching jobs). I think, in their private moments, they're excited about those potential opportunities. But more of their focus is directly on this game we have.

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49ERS reach NFC Championship game for third straight year

BEARS finish with a 10-8 record

STEVE YOUNG 16-of-22 passing, 143 yards, no interceptions

STEVE WALSH 10-of-19 passing, 77 yards, 2 interceptions

ERIK KRAMER 19-of-28 passing, 161 yards, no interceptions

49ERS 9:30 time of possession advantage in first half

RICKY WATTERS 55 yards rushing in first half

49ERS 122-16 rushing advantage in first half

By Kevin Lynch
Domination.

Those who want to appreciate the meaning of the word need merely to pop in a videotape of the 49ers' first half against the Bears in an NFC divisional playoff game last Saturday at Candlestick Park.

The 49ers disposed of their first playoff opponent by reeling off 30 unanswered points, 23 of those in the second quarter, on the way to a 44-15 victory.

It was the third time the 49ers ousted the Bears from the playoffs. The average margin of victory in those games is 25 points. In doing so the 49ers earned themselves their sixth NFC Championship game appearance in the last seven seasons.

WEATHER PREYED upon the minds of 49ers coaches before the game. A storm lurking off the Pacific Ocean came on the heels of a series of showers that doused the Bay Area all week. Forecasters predicted that inclement conditions could be the great equalizer in a game in which the 49ers were favored by 17 1/2 points.

Bears linebacker Joe Cain blasted tight end Brent Jones after a short gain on the second play of the day. The ball squirted loose. Defensive end Alonzo Spellman recovered, and the Bears took the lead six plays later on a Kevin Butler field goal.

Bears fans can stop reading now. That was their only highlight.

The Niners' next six drives would result in scores, and punter Klaus Wilmsmeyer wouldn't make an appearance until 5:38 remained in the third quarter. Their first score might have been the most impressive. The Niners' line blew holes in the Bears' vaunted defense and running back Ricky Watters took full advantage. The 49ers went 68 yards on their first touchdown drive. Watters accounted for 38 of them.

THE LINE PLAYED its best game, springing Watters for 54 yards in the first half and allowing Young ample time to pass. He was sacked just once and completed 16 of 22 passes for 143 yards and one touchdown in a little over two quarters.

"I think what put us over the top was serious communication," said Watters. "I told them (the linemen) earlier this week that if I make a mistake and something is wrong don't just let me go. Come tell me, I can handle it. When we communicate like that, it's a beautiful thing."

The line took him at his word. Guard Derrick Deese told Watters that Bears defenders were playing him to bounce inside and he should cut inside of his blocks. Watters complied.

The communication was so effective, the linemen doled out

blocking assignments right until the snap of the ball.

"We didn't care (about revealing strategy)," Deese said. "It comes down to who's determined to make the block."

The Bears actually surprised the 49ers. Because they were so bent on stopping the pass, the running game opened up.

"They usually play an eight-man front and keep their safeties in for heavy run support," center Bart Oates said. "It was seven-on-seven many times."

The 49ers gained 145 yards on the ground, the most over their last five games. Tackle Steve Wallace said he wasn't sure if the Niners would even get the opportunity to run.

"I SAW THE first seven (Niners) plays," Wallace said. "Five of them were passes. We (linemen) had lumps in our throats."

Run or pass, it was the most impressive performance by the Niners' offensive line all season. Wallace had a particularly good afternoon as he drove linebacker Joe Cain across the field on fullback William Floyd's first of three touchdowns. Wallace also kept defensive end Alonzo Spellman away from Young. Spellman recorded the only sack of Young, but it was after Young had fled the pocket.

When the Niners' deluge began the Bears were forced to abandon the most effective part of their offense, the running game. Young nearly doubled the Bears' rushing output in the first half himself (32 yards to the Bears' 17).

THE ONLY DRAMA in this game occurred in the second quarter. A failed fake punt by the Bears set up the 49ers at the Bears' 32-yard line. The 49ers were at the Bears' 6 when Young went to pass and saw the defense open up in front of him. He tucked away the ball and raced to the end zone. He scored easily, but was floored 4 yards deep into the zone by Bears safety Shaun Gayle. Young picked himself up and spiked the ball at Gayle's feet.

Wide receiver Jerry Rice rushed over and shoved Gayle. Soon it was a full-scale brawl, the highlight of which was Floyd tossing the 285-pound Spellman to the ground.

Young and Gayle made up and all was well, except for the Bears. They limped into the locker room at halftime trailing 30-3.

The 49ers scored on their first possession of the second half, which allowed Coach George Seifert to begin pulling out his starters.

And the defense was simply brilliant. Inside linebackers



FB William Floyd scored three touchdowns against the Bears

HOW THEY SCORED

FIRST QUARTER

BEARS — Kevin Butler 39-yard field goal. Drive: 6 plays, 14 yards. Time of possession: 3:02. Time remaining: 11:02. Key play: Alonzo Spellman fumble recovery at 49ers' 35. BEARS 3-0

49ERS — William Floyd 2-yard run. Drive: 13 plays, 68 yards. Time of possession: 7:21. Time remaining: 3:41. Key plays: Ricky Watters 11 run; Watters 9 run. 49ERS 7-3

SECOND QUARTER

49ERS — Brent Jones 8-yard pass from Steve Young (kick failed). Drive: 6 plays, 54 yards. Time of possession: 3:23. Time remaining: 14:16. Key plays: John Taylor 15 run; Taylor 15 pass from Young to Bears' 29. 49ERS 13-3

49ERS — Floyd 4-yard run (Brien kick). Drive: 9 plays, 61 yards. Time of possession: 5:02. Time remaining: 6:04. Key play: Watters 15 run. 49ERS 20-3

49ERS — Brien 36-yard field goal. Drive: 8 plays, 14 yards. Time of possession: 2:08. Time remaining: 2:35. Key plays: Merton Hanks 32 interception return; Jerry Rice 18 pass from Young. 49ERS 23-3

49ERS — Young 8-yard run. Drive: 5 plays, 32 yards. Time of possession: :54. Time remaining: 1:17. Key play: Watters 6 run. 49ERS 30-3

THIRD QUARTER

49ERS — Floyd 1-yard (Brien kick). Drive: 9 plays, 70 yards. Time of possession: 2:20. Time remaining: 11:51. Key plays: Dexter Carter 44 pass from Young; Jones 11 pass from Young to Bears' 1. 49ERS 37-3

FOURTH QUARTER

BEARS — Jim Flanigan 2-yard pass from Erik Kramer (pass failed). Drive: 10 plays, 71 yards. Time of possession: 5:55. Time remaining: 14:11. Key play: Keith Jennings 14 pass from Kramer. 49ERS 37-9

49ERS — Adam Walker 1-yard run (Brien kick). Drive: 4 plays, 37 yards. Time of possession: 2:20. Time remaining: 11:51. Key plays: Dexter Carter 44 pass from Elvis Grbac. 49ERS 44-9

BEARS — Lewis Tillman 1-yard run (pass failed). Drive: 16 plays, 70 yards. Time of possession: 6:07. Time remaining: 5:44. Key play: Tom Waddle 16 pass from Kramer. 49ERS 44-15

DENT FINALLY PLAYS

Defensive Richard Dent played for the first time since he underwent major surgery on his right knee in mid-September.

Dent showed his characteristic quickness, and actually wrestled the ball away from Bears quarterback Steve Walsh after a fumbled snap in the first quarter.

"I don't know him," Dent said of Walsh. "I don't know much about him but I would have liked to get a few more hits on him."

DENT THEN LEFT the game shortly thereafter when he twisted his right knee on a pass rush. He was played three plays.

Dent is listed probable for this week's NFC Championship game, with what's being called a knee bruise.

Dent played 11 seasons with the Bears before signing a two-year \$3 million contract with the 49ers over the off-season.

GAYLE FARCE

Jerry Rice said he lost respect for Bears safety Shaun Gayle.

Rice claimed Gayle stuck him with a flying elbow when Rice went for a pass in the first quarter. Rice doubled-over and had to leave the game for a play. Rice later shoved Gayle after Gayle hit Steve Young in the end zone following a touchdown. The play was clearly over when the contact occurred.

"I TOLD HIM it was bull—," Rice said. "I never thought he was a cheap-shot player, but he showed me something different today. I think I lost all respect for him."

Rice was applauded by teammates for quickly going to the defense of Young.

"Guys were coming over and congratulating me, like I had just won a bout or something," Rice said.

—Kevin Lynch

FOGHORN PRESS PRESENTS 49ERS REPORT PLAYER OF THE GAME



WILLIAM FLOYD

Fullback William Floyd was 49ers Report Player of the Game for his three-touchdown performance in the victory over the Bears.

Floyd also made some great blocks for Ricky Watters, who averaged 5.5 yards per carry for the afternoon.

Ken Norton Jr. and Gary Plummer making tackles all over the field. They had 18 tackles between them.

CORNERBACK DEION SANDERS played on reputation alone. He left in the third quarter with no passes having been thrown his way. Quarterback Steve Walsh decided he didn't want to risk throwing to Sanders, who finished the regular season with six interceptions and a Defensive Player of the Year trophy. The only contact Sanders had with the Bears was when he slapped Bears runner Raymont Harris a high five after a long gain in the fourth quarter. Sanders was on the sideline at the time, just watching the game play itself out.

The defense knew it was doing its job when the most potent offensive player for the Bears through three quarters was defensive tackle Jim Flanigan, who caught a 2-yard touchdown pass, the Bears' first TD, early in the fourth quarter.

THE BEARS TRIED to shake up their offense by inserting Erik Kramer at quarterback in the second half. Kramer did move the team, but by then the Bears were long out of it.

"Today, we played the best team in football," Bears defensive end Trace Armstrong said.

The 49ers take their next step to proving Armstrong right when they face the Cowboys in the NFC Championship game for the third year in a row.

WORTH NOTING

WHO'S GOING TO SPIKE?: FB William Floyd wanted OT Steve Wallace to spike the ball after one of his three touchdowns. Wallace refused, thinking he might draw a penalty. Floyd put Wallace's hand on the ball and then threw it into the turf for a group spike.

THE FIELD IS FINE: The Bears and 49ers were supposed to have played the game in a rainstorm. It rained on and off and the Candlestick Park field held up fairly well. "We're happy, and I think the 49ers are happy too," said Jim Del Phino, the supervisor of the grounds for the San Francisco Parks and Recreation Dept. "Or we'll all be looking for jobs tomorrow."

INJURIES: LB Anthony Peterson's season might be over, even if the 49ers reach the Super Bowl. Peterson pulled a hamstring covering a kick and is listed doubtful for the NFC Championship game. The rest of the injured are probable — DE Richard Dent (bruised knee), OT Steve Wallace (stinger), G Derrick Deese (bruised leg), DE Dennis Brown (sprained knee), FB William Floyd (bruised thigh).

ACTUAL SUFFERER: CB Deion Sanders took a quick exit from the locker room after the game. Sanders suffered from a chest cold all week. "It's tough, man,"

Sanders said. "I don't feel too good right now."

COSTLY FLAGS: The Bears were the least penalized team in the NFL this season, but had two crucial ones in the game. A hands to the face call negated a 22-yard gain in the first half. A pass interference call put the 49ers in position to score their third TD. The Niners were penalized just three times for 16 yards.

MILKING IT: The rap group Boyz II Men set the season record for the longest national anthem — two minutes and five seconds according to the watch of Dave Albee of the Marin Independent Journal.

CAPTAINS CHOSEN: Jerry Rice, Tim McDonald and Antonio Goss have been named the team captains for offense, defense and special teams respectively.

ODDS & ENDS: The best field poster? "It's raining, it's pouring, the 49ers are scoring" ... The 49ers have scored 44 points in each of their last two divisional playoff games ... In their three playoff meetings, the 49ers have outscored the Bears 95-18 ... In the last seven games the 49ers have outscored the Bears 200-26 ... DE Tim Harris had two sacks against the Bears. He earns \$5,000 for every sack.

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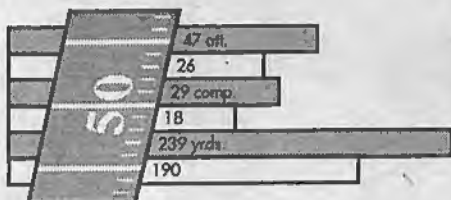
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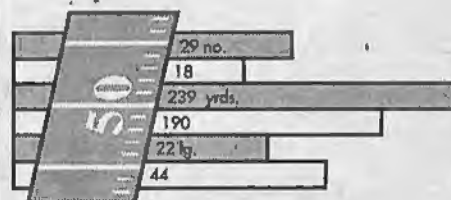
BY THE NUMBERS

GAME STATS

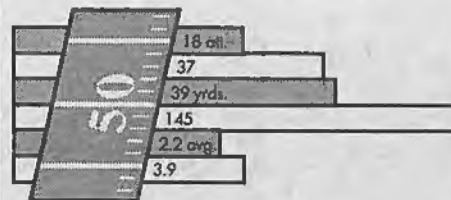
| PASSING | Att | Comp | Yds | Sks/Yds | TD | Lg | Int |
|--------------|-----------|-----------|------------|-------------|----------|-----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | | | | |
| Wlash | 19 | 10 | 78 | 0/0 | 0 | 22 | 2 |
| Kramer | 28 | 19 | 161 | 4/31 | 1 | 20 | 0 |
| Total | 47 | 29 | 239 | 4/31 | 1 | 22 | 2 |
| 49ers | | | | | | | |
| Young | 22 | 16 | 143 | 1/5 | 1 | 18 | 0 |
| Grbac | 4 | 2 | 47 | 0/0 | 0 | 44 | 0 |
| Total | 26 | 18 | 190 | 1/5 | 1 | 44 | 0 |



| RECEIVING | No | Yds | Lg | TD |
|---------------|-----------|------------|-----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | |
| Green | 5 | 43 | 22 | 0 |
| Wetnight | 5 | 39 | 19 | 0 |
| Harris | 5 | 24 | 10 | 0 |
| Graham | 4 | 33 | 13 | 0 |
| Waddle | 3 | 49 | 20 | 0 |
| Conway | 3 | 25 | 9 | 0 |
| Jennings | 2 | 20 | 14 | 0 |
| Tillman | 1 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Flanigan | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| Totals | 29 | 239 | 22 | 1 |
| 49ers | | | | |
| Jones | 5 | 26 | 11 | 1 |
| Taylor | 4 | 51 | 15 | 0 |
| Rice | 4 | 48 | 18 | 0 |
| Watters | 3 | 18 | 11 | 0 |
| Carter | 1 | 44 | 44 | 0 |
| Popson | 1 | 3 | 3 | 0 |
| Totals | 18 | 190 | 44 | 1 |



| RUSHING | Att | Yds | Avg | Lg | TD |
|--------------|-----------|------------|------------|-----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | | |
| Harris | 8 | 26 | 3.3 | 11 | 0 |
| Green | 2 | 8 | 4.0 | 5 | 0 |
| Tillman | 6 | 5 | 0.8 | 3 | 1 |
| Walsh | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| T. Carter | 1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 18 | 39 | 2.2 | 11 | 1 |
| 49ers | | | | | |
| Watters | 11 | 55 | 5.0 | 15 | 0 |
| Young | 5 | 32 | 6.4 | 7 | 1 |
| Floyd | 10 | 25 | 2.5 | 5 | 3 |
| D. Carter | 3 | 20 | 6.7 | 23 | 0 |
| Taylor | 1 | 15 | 15.0 | 15 | 0 |
| Walker | 3 | 3 | 1.0 | 2 | 1 |
| Grbac | 4 | -5 | -1.3 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 37 | 145 | 3.9 | 23 | 5 |



| INTERCEPTIONS | No | Yds | Lg | TD |
|---------------|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | |
| None | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 49ers | | | | |
| Hanks | 1 | 31 | 31 | 0 |
| Davis | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 2 | 31 | 31 | 0 |

| KICKOFF RETURNS | No | Yds | Lg | TD |
|-----------------|----------|------------|-----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | |
| Lewis | 5 | 125 | 32 | 0 |
| Green | 1 | 12 | 12 | 0 |
| Totals | 6 | 137 | 32 | 0 |
| 49ers | | | | |
| Walker | 1 | 14 | 14 | 0 |
| Carter | 1 | 10 | 10 | 0 |
| Totals | 2 | 24 | 14 | 0 |

| PUNTING | No | Yds | Avg | TB | In20 | Lg |
|---------------|----------|------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|
| Bears | | | | | | |
| Gardocki | 4 | 147 | 36.8 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| Totals | 4 | 147 | 36.8 | 0 | 0 | 50 |
| 49ers | | | | | | |
| Wilmsmeyer | 2 | 77 | 38.5 | 1 | 0 | 39 |
| Totals | 2 | 77 | 38.5 | 1 | 0 | 39 |

| PUNT RETURNS | No | FC | Yds | Lg | TD |
|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Bears | | | | | |
| Graham | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Totals | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 49ers | | | | | |
| Carter | 2 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 0 |
| Totals | 2 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 0 |

| TEAM STATISTICS | Bears | 49ers |
|-------------------------------|----------|----------|
| Total First Downs | 20 | 27 |
| By Rushing | 4 | 13 |
| By Penalty | 3 | 3 |
| Third Down Efficiency | 8-16-50% | 4-9-44% |
| Fourth Down Efficiency | 1-2-50% | 1-1-100% |
| Total Net Yards | 247 | 330 |
| Total Offensive Plays | 69 | 64 |
| Avg. Gain Per Offensive Play | 3.6 | 5.2 |
| Net Yards Rushing | 39 | 145 |
| Total Rushing Plays | 18 | 37 |
| Avg. Gain Per Rushing Play | 2.2 | 3.9 |
| Net Yards Passing | 208 | 185 |
| Times Thrown/Yards Lost | 4/31 | 1/5 |
| Gross Yards Passing | 239 | 190 |
| Pass Att.-Comp.-Int. | 47-29-2 | 26-18-0 |
| Avg. Gain Per Passing Play | 4.1 | 6.9 |
| Punts/Average | 4/36.8 | 2/38.5 |
| Had Blocked | 0 | 0 |
| Yards on Punt Returns | 0 | 6 |
| Yards on Kickoff Returns | 137 | 24 |
| Yards on Interception Returns | 0 | 31 |
| Penalties/Yards | 4/32 | 3/16 |
| Fumbles/Lost | 2/0 | 3/1 |
| Touchdowns | 2 | 6 |
| Rushing | 1 | 5 |
| Passing | 1 | 1 |
| Returns | 0 | 0 |
| Extra points Made/Attempted | 0/2 | 5/6 |
| Kicking Made/Attempts | 0/0 | 5/6 |
| Passing Made/Attempts | 0/2 | 0/0 |
| Rushing Made/Attempts | 0/0 | 0/0 |
| Field Goals Made/Attempted | 1/1 | 1/1 |
| Time of Possession | 29:40 | 30:20 |

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LOOK!

This week's poster of Steve Young was the winning design in a poster contest conducted this past fall at the Columbus College of Art & Design, a four-year art school located in Columbus, Ohio. The design was created by senior advertising design major Mark Searfoss from Lakeview, Ohio and Waynesfield-Goshen High School. In addition to having his poster published in 49ers Report, Mark was awarded \$250. Congratulations!

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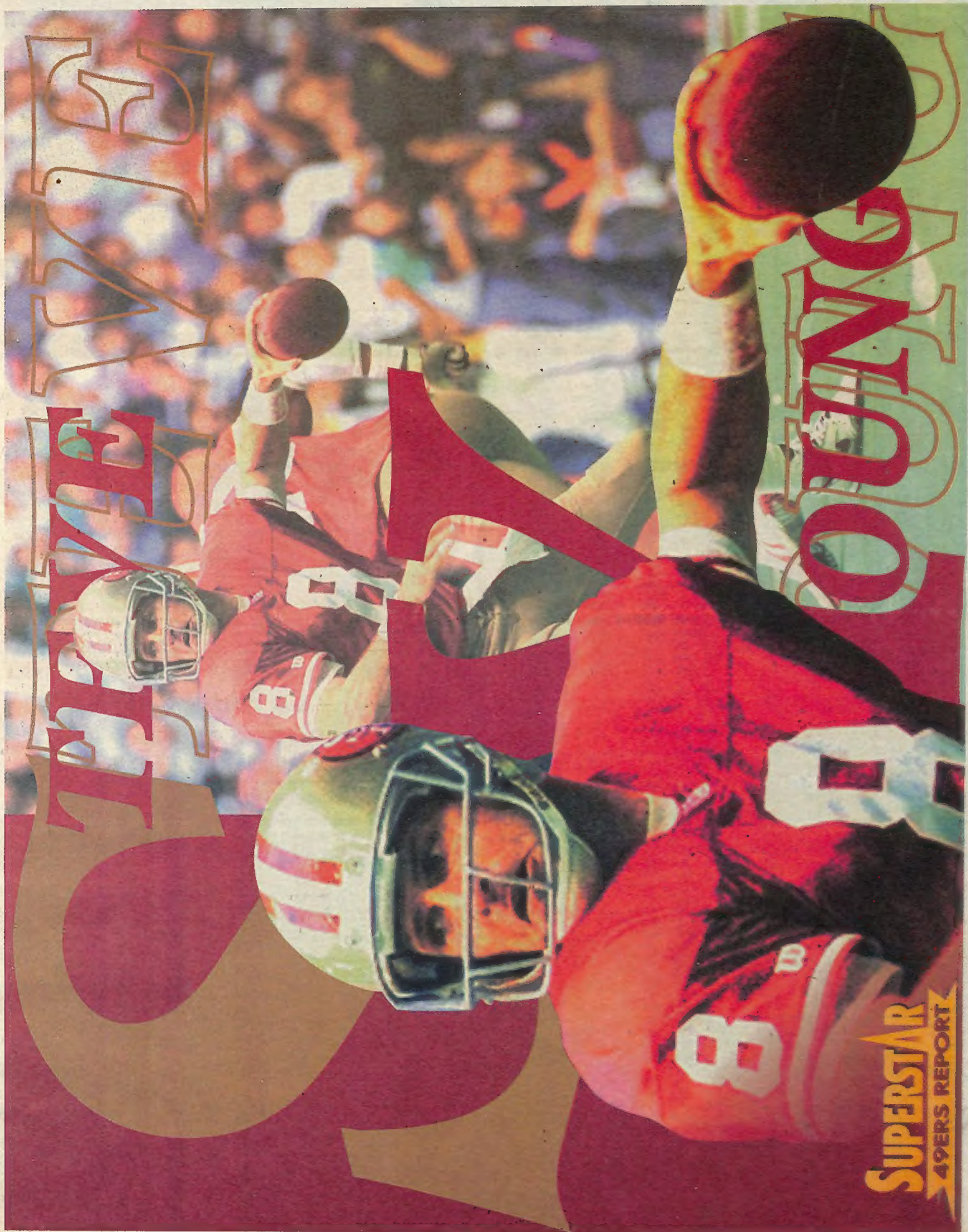
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SUPERSTAR
49ERS REPORT

PREVIEW

49ERS

ROSTER AND DEPTH CHART

| | | | |
|----|--------------------|-----|-----|
| 4 | Brien, Doug | K | QB |
| 8 | Young, Steve | P | P |
| 10 | Wilmsmeyer, Klaus | QB | QB |
| 14 | Musgrave, Bill | QB | QB |
| 18 | Grbac, Elvis | RB | RB |
| 20 | Loville, Derek | CB | CB |
| 21 | Sanders, Deion | CB | CB |
| 22 | Drakeford, Tyrone | CB | CB |
| 25 | Davis, Eric | RB | RB |
| 27 | Walker, Adam | S | S |
| 28 | Hall, Dana | S | S |
| 32 | Watters, Ricky | S | S |
| 33 | Dodge, Dedrick | RB | RB |
| 35 | Carter, Dexter | S | S |
| 36 | Hanks, Merton | FB | FB |
| 40 | Floyd, William | CB | CB |
| 41 | Cook, Tol | FB | FB |
| 43 | Logan, Marc | S | S |
| 46 | McDonald, Tim | LB | LB |
| 50 | Plummer, Gary | LB | LB |
| 51 | Norton, Ken | S | S |
| 53 | Peterson, Anthony | LB | LB |
| 54 | Woodall, Lee | S | S |
| 55 | Mitchell, Kevin | LB | LB |
| 57 | Jackson, Rickey | DE | DE |
| 58 | Kelly, Todd | G-C | G-C |
| 61 | Sapola, Jesse | S | S |
| 63 | Deese, Derrick | G-C | G-C |
| 64 | Tamm, Ralph | T | T |
| 65 | Boatswain, Harry | C | C |
| 66 | Oates, Bart | G-C | G-C |
| 67 | Dalman, Chris | DE | DE |
| 68 | Milstead, Rod | T | T |
| 71 | Mann, Charles | T | T |
| 72 | Thomas, Mark | WR | WR |
| 74 | Wallace, Steve | WR | WR |
| 75 | Pollack, Frank | TE | TE |
| 78 | Barton, Harris | TE | TE |
| 80 | Rice, Jerry | WR | WR |
| 81 | Owens, Darrick | WR | WR |
| 82 | Taylor, John | TE | TE |
| 84 | Jones, Brent | WR | WR |
| 85 | Popson, Ted | TE | TE |
| 86 | Carolan, Brett | WR | WR |
| 88 | Singleton, Nate | DE | DE |
| 89 | McCaffrey, Ed | DE | DE |
| 92 | Wilson, Troy | DT | DT |
| 94 | Stubblefield, Dana | DE | DE |
| 95 | Dent, Richard | DE | DE |
| 96 | Brown, Dennis | DT | DT |
| 97 | Young, Bryant | LB | LB |
| 98 | Goss, Antonio | DE | DE |
| 99 | Tim Harris | | |

OFFENSE

WR-82-TAYLOR, 88-Singleton
LT-74-WALLACE, 75-Pollack
LG-61-SAPOLU, 67-Dalman
C-66-OATES, 67-Dalman
RG-63-DEESE, 68-Milstead
RT-75-POLLACK, 85-Boatswain
TE-84-JONES, 85-Popson
WR-80-RICE, 83-McCaffrey
QB-8-YOUNG, 18-Grbac
RB-32-WATTERS, 35-Carter
FB-40-FLOYD, 43-Logan

DEFENSE

LE-98-BROWN, 71-Mann
LT-97-YOUNG, 72-Thomas
RT-94-STUBBLEFIELD, 72-Thomas
RE-67-JACKSON, 82-Wilson
LLB-54-WOODALL, 98-Goss
MLB-50-PLUMMER, 55-Mitchell
RLB-51-NORTON, 53-Peterson
LCB-25-DAVIS, 41-Cook
RCB-21-SANDERS, 41-Cook
SS-46-McDONALD, 68-Hall
FS-36-HANKS, 68-Hall

SPECIAL TEAMS

P-4-BRIEN, 10-Wilmsmeyer
K-10-WILMSMEYER
H-10-WILMSMEYER, 18-Grbac
KC-66-OATES
PC-66-OATES
PR-35-CARTER, 98-Singleton
KR-88-SINGLETON, 35-Carter



"I'm going to go out on a limb here," 49ers center Bart Oates said following his team's 21-14 victory over the Cowboys. "There's a good chance we'll see them again if we do what we're supposed to do."

Most people hate it when lawyers are right. But Oates, a lawyer, is right. For the third year in a row the 49ers will face the Cowboys in the NFC Championship game.

FOR THE SECOND time in three seasons, the war of grit will take place at Candlestick Park. Some thought the Cowboys might not make it. They lost two of their last three regular-season games. They scored fewer than 15 points in three of their final six games after they had scored more than 15 in their previous 18 outings.

Sport magazine declared the Cowboys' reign was over. Criticism was being heaped upon quarterback Troy Aikman and offense coordinator Ernie Zampese. Injuries began to mount. Former head coach



QB Troy Aikman

Jimmy Johnson said the team was just bored.

They weren't bored in their 35-9 victory over the Packers, at least not in the first half. By halftime the Cowboys had a 28-9 advantage and the game was over. In the second half, the Cowboy players were more interested in entertaining defensive end Charles Haley's kids than in the game at hand.

AND AFTER beating the Cowboys on Nov. 13, the Niners know they can match up with the world champs.

"They're a different team," Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman said after the loss. "They've upgraded their personnel."

The old 49ers dropped the last three championship games in a four-year stretch.

"I can't say there's a tenseness (to playing the Cowboys again)," Niners coach George Seifert said. "There's an excitement to it. This is the way everyone predicted it. This is the way it should be."

WHEN THE COWBOYS HAVE THE BALL

The 49ers used misdirection and the pass with great success last time. Steve Young didn't get much time to pass, so he was used on bootleg runs. He gained 54 yards on three first-half carries using the bootleg. The Cowboys will certainly have that on their minds this time. The 49ers are likely to try more straight-ahead running plays, to minimize the effect of the Cowboys' great speed. It'll be crucial Young and offensive coordinator

Mike Shanahan know when to throw deep. The cornerbacks of the Cowboys, particularly Larry Brown, can be beaten deep. The trick will be providing Young enough time to get his receivers downfield. The Cowboys also could be susceptible to pump fakes. Their safeties like to watch for receivers breaking underneath, so a fake could bring them up into coverage and allow receivers to go deep.

WHEN THE 49ERS HAVE THE BALL

The Cowboys had no problem piling up yardage against the 49ers in the last game. Their 408 yards was 100 more than the Niners compiled. The Cowboys had five drives of 35 yards or more. But the 49ers did a tremendous job of hemming in running back Emmitt Smith, allowing him just 26 yards on 11 carries in the second half. Of course, it would make it easier if the

injured (hamstring) Smith didn't play. Still, even without Smith, the defense will have to contend with the Cowboys' huge offensive line. The 49ers used safety Tim McDonald as an extra linebacker against the Cowboys, which helped against the run. If Smith doesn't play, McDonald might stay in the secondary.

PLAYOFFS

FACTS & FIGURES

DATE: Sunday, Jan. 15
SITE: Candlestick Park
KICKOFF: 1 p.m.
SURFACE: Grass

TELEVISION: Fox (Channel 2 in Bay Area)
SERIES: Tied, 11-11-1
LAST MEETING: 49ers 21, Cowboys 14,
Nov. 13 at Candlestick Park

WORTH NOTING

BIG HURT IN BIG D: It's possible RB Emmitt Smith could miss this game because of a strained hamstring. Smith injured it in a Monday night contest against the Saints and missed the last two games of the regular season. He re-injured it last week against the Packers. The 49ers have heard this before. Smith was supposed to be limited by an injured shoulder in the '93 NFC Championship game, but he had 173 yards total yards in that one. "We assume Smith will play," Niners coach George Seifert said.

OTHER INJURED COWBOYS: WR Alvin Harper was supposed to be out for the season with a knee injury. He came back in a week and had 136 yards receiving against the Niners in the last game. The Cowboys, however, have had their share of injuries this season, and it might be one reason they haven't been as dominating. OT Erik Williams is out for the year because of a knee injury incurred in an automobile accident. WR Michael Irvin has a sore hand and bruised thigh. G Nate Newton dislocated a toe two weeks ago in practice. OT Larry Allen has a sore knee. All are expected to play.

IRVIN DOES A NAMATH: Ex-Cowboys coach

Jimmy Johnson predicted victory over the 49ers in last year's NFC title game. His team responded, beating the 49ers 38-21. This time, WR Michael Irvin has gone into the predicting business. "We will go to the Super Bowl," he told television commentator Terry Bradshaw. "We will get our third Super Bowl. We will do something nobody else will do. I can't allow myself and my teammates to think any other way. It's poison."

IT JUST GETS HARDER: WR Michael Irvin gave a reason why his team hasn't been as good as it was the last two years when the Cowboys won back-to-back Super Bowls. "We lost lots of players last year," Irvin said. "We're going to be less talented than we were the year before. We have to make fewer mistakes. If anything, we're making more."

AIKMAN ROLLING: QB Troy Aikman has struggled towards the end of the season. He has been injured, battling through a sprained knee, a broken nose and bruised thumb. In the playoffs against the Packers, Aikman was his old self as he passed for more than 300 yards and raised his playoff record to 7-0. After witnessing that performance, Niners coach George Seifert said, "Aikman in back on track."

KEY PLAYERS

49ERS

Their will be no bigger player than QB Steve Young. In the last Cowboys game he was mistake-free and rushed for a season-high 60 yards while throwing for a 183 yards. Young will have to stay mistake-free, and be more productive with his arm in this game ... The Cowboys isolated Packers CB Terrell Buckley in the divisional playoff game and got some big plays out of it. They'll try to do the same thing with Eric Davis, who's having a better year than Buckley ... DTs Dana Stubblefield and Bryant Young will again have to have good games to stop the Cowboys' lead draws ... LB Ken Norton is playing his best football of the year, and will again be on the spot against his former team.



TE Jay Novacek



WR Michael Irvin



DE Charles Haley

COWBOYS

The classic battle between CB Deion Sanders and WR Michael Irvin will be renewed. Actually, Sanders will face both Irvin and Alvin Harper, and he can't wait after seeing no action against the Bears. Harper gathered in a 90-yard reception last time, but it was when Sanders was out of the game because of a dislocated finger ... TE Jay Novacek will long for redemption. S Merton Hanks guarded him most of the day, and held him to five catches for 51 yards. Novacek had a playoff-record 11 receptions for 104 yards against the Packers ... DE Charles Haley,

the Cowboys' best pass rusher, will renew hostilities with OT Steve Wallace ... QB Troy Aikman will have less room for error if RB Emmitt Smith does not play.

COWBOYS

ROSTER AND DEPTH CHART

| | | |
|----|------------------|-----|
| 8 | Troy Aikman | QB |
| 9 | Rodney Peete | QB |
| 17 | Jason Barrett | QB |
| 18 | Chris Boniol | K |
| 19 | John Jett | P |
| 22 | Emmitt Smith | RB |
| 24 | Larry Brown | CB |
| 26 | Kevin Smith | CB |
| 28 | Darren Woodson | S |
| 28 | Kenneth Garit | S |
| 30 | Darren Studds | S |
| 31 | Brock Marion | S |
| 32 | Blair Thomas | RB |
| 34 | Tommye Agce | FB |
| 37 | James Washington | S |
| 40 | Bill Bates | S |
| 41 | Dave Thomas | CB |
| 44 | Lincoln Coleman | RB |
| 46 | Joe Fishback | S |
| 47 | Clayton Holmes | CB |
| 48 | Darryl Johnston | FB |
| 50 | Derrick Brownlow | LB |
| 52 | Jim Schwartz | LB |
| 53 | Mark Stepnoski | C |
| 55 | Robert Jones | LB |
| 58 | Dixon Edwards | LB |
| 58 | Darrin Smith | LB |
| 60 | Derek Kennard | G |
| 61 | Nate Newton | G |
| 65 | Ron Stone | G |
| 67 | Russell Maryland | DT |
| 68 | Frank Cornish | G/C |
| 69 | George Hegamin | T |
| 70 | Dale Hellestrae | G/C |
| 71 | Mark Tuel | T |
| 73 | Larry Allen | T |
| 76 | Jerry Reynolds | T |
| 77 | Jim Jeffcoat | DE |
| 78 | Leon Lett | DE |
| 80 | Alvin Harper | WR |
| 82 | Cory Fleming | WR |
| 83 | Wille Jackson | WR |
| 84 | Jay Novacek | TE |
| 85 | Kevin Williams | WR |
| 88 | Michael Irvin | WR |
| 88 | Scott Galbraith | TE |
| 91 | Matt Vanderbeck | LB |
| 92 | Tony Tolbert | DE |
| 94 | Charles Haley | DE |
| 95 | Chad Hennings | DT |
| 96 | Shante Carver | DE |
| 98 | Godfrey Myles | LB |
| 99 | Harvin McCormack | DT |

OFFENSE

WR-80-HARPER, 82-Fleming
LT-71-TUEL, 65-Stone
LG-61-NEWTON, 95-Stone
C-53-STEPNOSKI, 70-Hellestrae
RG-60-KENNARD, 65-Stone
RT-73-ALLEN, 68-Hegamin
TE-84-NOVACEK, 89-Galbraith
WR-88-IRVIN, 85-Williams
QB-8-AIKMAN, 9-Peete
FB-48-JOHNSTON, 34-Agce
RB-22-SMITH, 44-Coleman

DEFENSE

LE-92-TOLBERT, 77-Jeffcoat
LT-67-MARYLAND, 95-Hennings
RT-78-LETT, 99-McCormack
RE-84-HALEY, 77-Jeffcoat
SLB-58-EDWARDS, 98-Myles
MLB-55-JONES, 98-Myles
WLB-58-SMITH, 50-Brownlow
LCB-24-BROWN, 47-Holmes
RCB-24-BROWN, 47-Holmes
FS-37-WASHINGTON, 31-Marion
SS-28-WOODSON, 31-Marion

SPECIAL TEAMS

P-19-JETT, 18-Boniol
K-18-BONIOL
H-84-NOVACEK, 18-Jett
KOR-85-WILLIAMS, 81-Marion
PR-85-WILLIAMS, 47-Holmes
PC-70-HELLESTRAE, 48-Johnston
NC-70-HELLESTRAE, 48-Johnston

NEVER A DU

It started, as always,

in the sweltering

heat of training

camp in Rocklin,

Calif., that suburban ham-

let that has welcomed the

49ers for the last 14 years.

by Kevin Lynch

Players from varying backgrounds, ethnicities and income levels are thrown together. The 49ers gather each season with hopes of a Super Bowl appearance six months later.

This year was no different. With the Niners on the verge of an NFC championship, Rocklin once again a run of miles away and the experiences of training camp thousands of years old.

NO MATTER WHAT happens to the 49ers next week, we would be remiss not to remember this as a wondrous season. Niners fans are spoiled. Every year it's Super Bowl or bust, embitterment or elation. Those same fans miss out on what happens along the way. The 49ers are one of the most successful sports franchises in history. Losing another championship game can't mar that.

The season was remarkable. It started with Jerry Rice setting the home-run record of football statistics — most career touchdowns. It continued with a vanquishing of the league champion Cowboys to partially

avenge two consecutive conference-title game losses, and finished with a in-season record of 10 straight victories.

Here's a closer look at the 1994 season.

RECORD-BREAKING RICE ▼

Rice went into the season opener needing three touchdowns to surpass Jim Brown's career record of 126.

Rice scored his first touchdown in the first quarter when he caught a pass over the middle and stumbled when Raiders cornerback Lionel Washington grabbed him by the foot. Rice looked like he was going to land on the Candlestick Park turf,



Look out, Jim Brown!

but regained his balance and sped 69 yards for a touchdown.

His friend and trainer, Raymond Farris, was at the back of the end zone. Farris spends six hours a day with Rice, every day, in the off-season. They run hills, do wind sprints

▲ L M O M E N T

and lift weights. Rice was racing right for him after scoring that first touchdown.

"He jumped on me," Farris said later. "I was real surprised. It was like he was in a zone, going into a zone and score two more."

Rice obliged. He took a reverse and went 23 yards through a helpless Raiders defense for his second touchdown.

The 49ers were ahead 37-14 in the fourth quarter and Rice fully expected to be taken out of the game. He went to the telephone and talked to receivers coach Darby Kirksey. Kirksey didn't congratulate Rice for tying Brown's record. He bawled him out for some technical errors Rice made. Rice, the perfectionist, wouldn't have it any other way.

"Am I coming out of the game?" Rice asked. AFTER CONSULTING with offensive coordinator Mike Shanahan, the 49ers' brain trust decided to give Rice one more shot at a touchdown.

When the Raiders failed to get a first down on their next possession, the 49ers took over at the Raiders' 38. Steve Young sent Rice to the post. He underthrew him, but Rice made the adjustment, then outjumped defensive back Albert Lewis and howled him over for the record-breaker.

Rice was immediately hoisted onto the arms of his teammates. He then drifted over to the sideline and, with tears streaming down his face, handed the ball he had just caught to his wife, Jackie.

"We were privileged to see one of the great moments in history tonight," Niners coach George Seifert said beaming like a proud father. "I think the man is obviously the greatest wide receiver to have played the game."

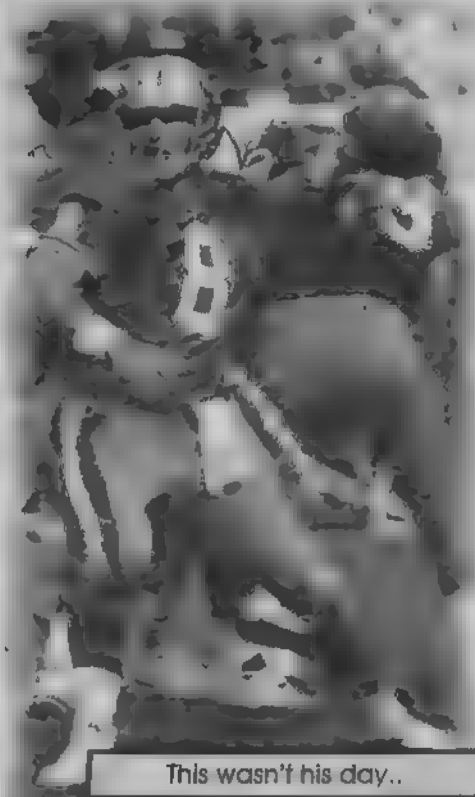
The 49ers won 44-14. It was a foreboding of what would happen later. The 49ers would land themselves into Super Bowl contention, while the highly touted Raiders would miss the playoffs altogether.

THE JOE GAME ▶

The second game on the schedule was never referred to as the Chiefs versus the Niners in the Bay Area. It was simply

called the Joe Game.

It was the first time since leaving the 49ers after the 1992 season Joe Montana would play against his old team. It was the first time since his 1993 trade that he and



This wasn't his day..

Young would quarterback their respective teams against each other.

Montana and Young had been embroiled in a most exhausting, media-fueled quarterback controversy. Now they were facing each other as members of opposing clubs.

Guard Jesse Sapolu and defensive end Richard Dent joined the growing list of injured in the second quarter. The 49ers' offensive line was now missing three of its five starters. The remaining line members provided only passive resistance to the Chiefs' pass rush. Young was sacked four times. He was even slugged by defensive end Neil Smith after he handed off. He was

left on the ground a couple times after being knocked down by hard hits.

Young still threw for 288 yards and a touchdown. He was intercepted twice and fumbled another time. Montana was sacked once. Given the time to pass, Montana threw for a modest 203 yards and two scores, but he was mistake-free.

The 49ers had a chance to tie the game with two minutes left, but wide receiver John Taylor fumbled and the Chiefs hung on to win 24-17. They would call it their greatest victory of the season.

Young had lost, or at least that was what the scoreboard said.

Actually, he was victorious. He'd won over his teammates with his grit and toughness. The enduring image of that game, and of the season for that matter, is Young afterwards.

He dressed quickly, and was then hemmed in by a horde of reporters who gathered in front of his locker. With television lights in his face, Young answered the same questions over and over again, with grace and a professionalism far beyond the call of duty.

"I got another lesson from the master," Young said.

Here he was — beaten spiritually, psychologically and physically — answering the old questions with freshness and honesty. By the time Young left for the team bus his shirt was soaked through with sweat caused by the TV lights.

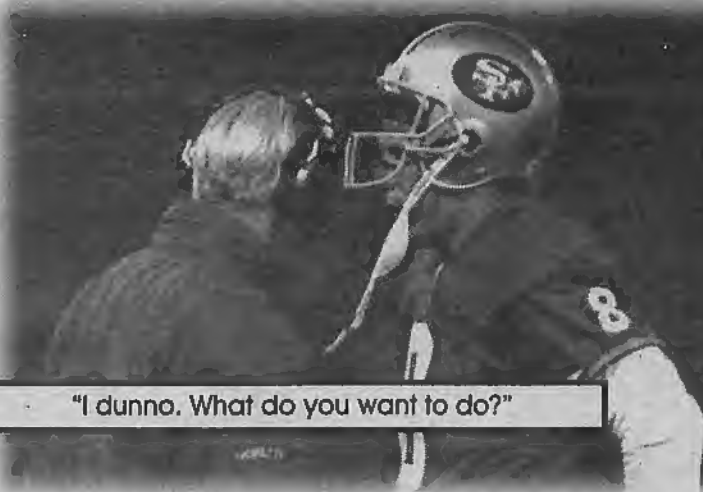
DEION ▼

George Seifert was strolling through the 49ers' locker room a few days after the Chiefs game. With him was cornerback Deion Sanders.

Sanders is one of the best pass-coverage guys ever created and was thinking of signing with the 49ers after deciding he

would no longer play for the Falcons.

Seifert was telling Sanders about the 49ers' way. They don't like high-stepping or garish little dances in the end zone



"I dunno. What do you want to do?"

around here. They even frowned upon a hard spike of the ball after scoring. By the end of conversation, Sanders, a natural showman, was having second thoughts.

HE SIGNED ANYWAY. In his press conference, Sanders said if he picked off a pass he wouldn't high-step the last 30 yards into the end zone, just the last 20. He looked at Seifert.

"Maybe the last 10," Sanders said.

The signing of Sanders was, of course, controversial. Saints owner Tom Benson suspected the 49ers were illegally skirting the salary cap. He called the 49ers a Mickey Mouse organization. The league office assured everyone the signing was above board.

Sanders made his first appearance in the third game of the season against the Rams. He played nickel back and nearly intercepted a pass.

By the next week against the Saints, Sanders was starting, Benson was fuming. The 49ers were up 17-14 with 32 seconds left. It was fourth down, the last chance for the Saints to keep their hopes alive. Quarterback Jim Everett fired a desperation pass and Sanders cut in front of the intended receiver. He could have just knocked down the ball and that game would have ended.

He instead picked off the pass and darted 74 yards for a touchdown.

For someone on ground level the experience was indescribable. Fans jumped to their feet at the sight of him. They screamed and waved their hands as they watched Sanders high-step to the end zone. The sound was so deafening and fans so engrossed, an earthquake could have hit San Francisco and no one at Candlestick Park would have noticed.

THE BLOWOUT ▲

The 49ers were struggling, despite the high-priced defensive free agents they'd managed to sign. The running game was stopped almost completely because of injuries to the line. Steve Young was getting smeared in every game.

The revamped defense was trying to mesh. Coaches weren't sure how aggressive to be. Safety Tim McDonald said it was difficult to fit all these star players into one defense.

The woes of both units were completely exploited one afternoon by the Eagles, who dealt the 49ers their worst loss in Candlestick Park history, 40-8. Young was pulled out after being hit by defensive end William Fuller.

It was late in the game, and there was no way the 49ers could mount a comeback. After watching the hit, the third on Young in three plays, Niners coach George Seifert had seen enough.

Young was irate. A television camera caught him yelling, "That's bulls—" behind Seifert's back. A day later Seifert said he made the wrong move. It was a heat-of-battle decision. They had already lost the game and Seifert didn't want to lose his quarterback as well. The controversy and the game seemed to have a galvanizing effect on the team.

Rookie fullback William Floyd replaced smaller Marc Logan and right offensive tackle Harry Boatwain was replaced by Frank Pollack.

THE COMEBACK

It didn't look as if the changes were doing any good. The 49ers fell behind the Lions 14-0 in the first quarter of the next game.

"They made a comeback that would last the next two months. Rookie fullback William Floyd started it by plunging into the end zone from a yard out, carrying half the Lions' defense with him. He ripped off his helmet and looked to be taunting the crowd in the Silverdome.

Ricky Watters joined him. Both were reprimanded by Coach George Seifert when they got to the sideline.

The 49ers came back and won, 27-21. Floyd scored another touchdown in the third quarter that put the Niners ahead to stay. A day later, Floyd didn't apologize for his antics on the field.

"The game has changed," Floyd said. "Vince Lombardi isn't coaching anymore."

He said he would try to tone it down. Seifert said he had reached a middle ground

individual basis. This current team had a lot of young, enthusiastic players, and he didn't want to cramp their styles.

THE COWBOYS ▼

The 49ers had won four in a row when the Cowboys came to town.

They had drubbed the Redskins, 37-22. Offensive tackle Harris Barton returned to the lineup.

The 49ers thought they had the talent to contend with the Cowboys, but they had lost the last three games to them, two in the last two NFC Championship games.

The game was viewed as key for the



Waggle on, Steve!

Niners. They had to win to break the hex. The pressure was once again on Steve Young, who had uncharacteristically accounted for four turnovers in the last three outings against the Cowboys.

THE COWBOYS scored first. Wide receiver Alvin Harper put running back Emmitt Smith in position with a 90-yard pass play. Harper has long been a Niners killer. Fans got that same sick feeling they'd had in the last three losses to these guys. The 49ers then unveiled their secret weapon — the bootleg, or "waggle."

They use it to frustrate the Cowboys' speedy defense, particularly former Niners linebacker Charles Haley. Young carried the ball eight times for a season-high 60 yards and a touchdown from the waggle.

Safety Merton Hanks frustrated Cowboys quarterback Troy Aikman, intercepting him twice, including once on the goal line.

The Niners stretched their lead to two touchdowns in the fourth quarter as Young passed to tight end Brent Jones from the bootleg. Young ran a victory lap. He said he was just looking for someone to jump on. He finally found running back Ricky Watters and knocked him down.

WHAT'S NEXT?

The only other regular-season game the 49ers lost was the finale, a meaningless contest against the Vikings. Succumbing to his instinct to protect his stars, Seifert pulled most of his starters out of the game in the second half.

Still, the 49ers' 13-3 record was the best in the league and set them up with a bye in the first round of the playoffs and the home-field edge through the tournament. No matter what the 49ers do the rest of the way, no one will soon forget the 1994 season.

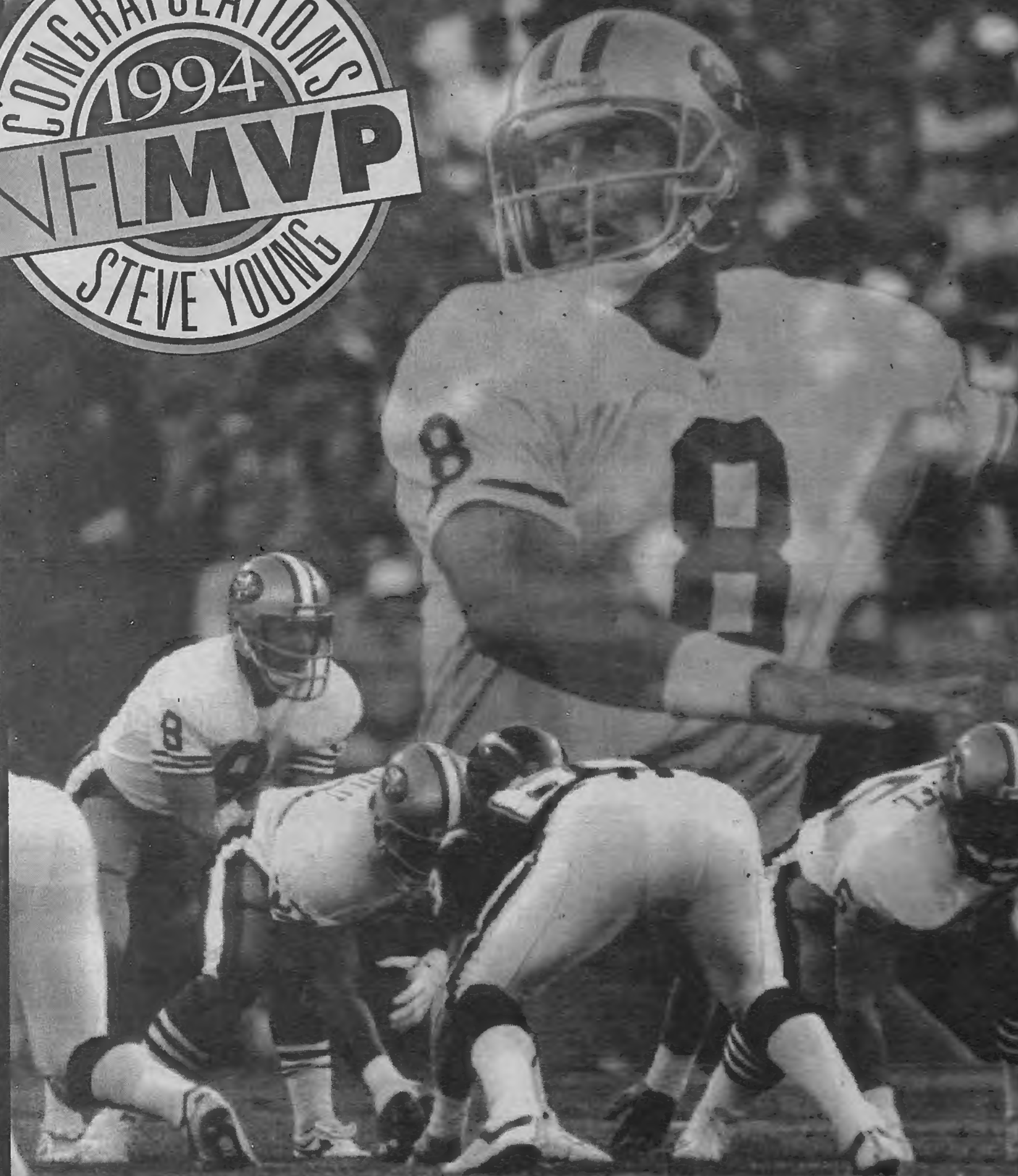


with his team. He was officially loosening the reins. He would later say he should have done it earlier and that he hoped he hadn't held back any other players.

His decision to let his players express themselves was remarkable. Seifert rightly said that every team must be judged on a



...But this was sure his.



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